

September 2, 2020

A devotion for you.

Often in the Christian Community when people are called to be leaders of God's people, whether deacon, elder, minister, or teacher they come to the calling with a completely wrong attitude and frame of mind. Some come thinking they are now lord's over God's people others just seem to wander around not knowing or trying to do anything at all. Some do, however, come with a heart after God's heart. Read with me from Jeremiah 3:11-15.

11 And the LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. 12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever. 13 'Only acknowledge your iniquity, That you have transgressed against the LORD your God And have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree, And you have not obeyed My voice,' declares the LORD. 14 'Return, O faithless sons,' declares the LORD; 'For I am a master to you, And I will take you one from a city and two from a family, And I will bring you to Zion.' 15 "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.

In churches people speak often of having a heart after God's heart. What does that mean? Is it something that you and I can do or become? In this devotion we will endeavor to understand what it means to have a heart after God's heart, specifically as this relates to being a shepherd of God's people. Each Christian is in some way a shepherd of God's people; this is not limited only to professional clergy.

Jeremiah the Prophet prophesied from the 13th year of Josiah until the 11th year of Zedekiah in the 5th month of the Babylonian exile. During Jeremiah's ministry Judah, especially Jerusalem, was devastated by Nebuchadnezzar and his armies. The book of Lamentations gives us some insight into how desperate the people's situation was. History tells us much more. Yet, as desperate as the people were physically, they were more desperate spiritually. The devastation occurred because the people no longer knew God. They had turned completely away from God; ignorance of God leads to apostasy. The people went to the temple but their worship was hollow, empty, and meaningless. Their rituals were performed mechanically and without feeling or passion. The people studied but had no spiritual understanding of God's word. The study of God's word became nothing more than an academic exercise.

Often we scratch our heads and wonder what God is up to because of who God gives to us as leaders. Many times it makes no sense to us as to what God has done. It is not up to us to make sense out what has happened. That is we are not always called to understand. We are, however, called to have faith in God and to trust in him. The Sage admonishes, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6). We must remember "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in the earth, in the seas and in all the deeps" (Psalm 135:6).

Paul while saying his farewells to the elders of the church in Ephesus warns them to "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). We must remember that all who are in leadership in our church are given to us by God and are called according to His purpose.

Before a shepherd can feed their flock on knowledge and understanding they must first be fed. Everyone who is an elder in our church must actively seek to be fed by Jesus. Before they can feed you they must first feast upon the manna from heaven-the Bread of Life-Jesus Christ. Before our shepherds can lead you to quiet waters they must drink long and deep from the Living Water-Jesus the Son of God.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and every deacon, elder, or minister in the Christian Community must have a relationship with Jesus. Moreover they must be seeking to grow in that relationship. It is not enough to have an intellectual understanding of Jesus. You must have a faith apprehension that Jesus died for you and paid for your sins. You must know by faith that Jesus forgives you and is your Savior and God. Before you can feed your sheep you must first have eaten.

Paul challenges Timothy and us when he writes, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Learn how to handle God's word of truth so that you can feed your sheep!

If we are to be shepherds after God's heart then there are things we should avoid in life and things we should do in order to be excellent examples and leaders in the Christian Community.

Among the things we must avoid in order to live Christian lifestyles are gossip, youthful lusts, foolish and ignorant speculations, and not to have an argumentative nature. The question that some may have is "Why?" Each of these things we are told to avoid cause division among people. Jesus prays for the unity of His church. In John 17:15-23 Jesus prays that His disciples, that is you and I as well as Peter, James, John, and the other eleven that we be kept safe from the evil one. Jesus further prays that we remain in unity for this will be a sign to the world

that He did come from God to be our Savior. In that this is true, it is in our unity where Satan will attack us so as to divide us. It is an imperative that we remember that disagreement is okay as long as we remember to share the same position before God on our knees in prayer.

As Christians we are to pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, kindness, the ability to teach God's word, and patience. It is these things, and some others, that seek to build unity among God's people. As shepherds to God's people you must be examples of this kind of lifestyle. Then you will be shepherds after God's heart!

We look at the outer appearance of others. God examines our hearts. Those who are genuine shepherds in the Christian Community are given to us by God. They are called to lead us. Let us follow them as they follow the Good Shepherd. Let us pray.

Sovereign Lord, thank You for the leaders You provide for us; leaders after Your own heart. Help us to remember that we are all called to be leaders and examples in our communities through Jesus Christ, amen.

Remember, what you say can be compromised if what you do does not match your words.

Until the nets are full